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The Art of the Actor

C. COQUELIN

The Art of the Actor

Translated with an Introduction by
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'L'Art du Comédien' was first published in Paris
in 1894

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Dedicated to
DAME MADGE KENDAL, D.B.E.
La doyenne du Théâtre Anglaise

1932

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

COQUELIN'S *L'Art du Comédien* was published in Paris in the year 1894. It was the best among a series of monographs on the art of acting which represented the existing tradition of the Comédie Française and the Conservatoire de Musique et de Déclamation.

Two years after its appearance I had the good fortune to be admitted as *auditrice* to all the dramatic classes at the second of these institutions. The Comédie was still almost at the zenith of that greatness which had astounded the world in the years following the Franco-Prussian War; a greatness which exercised an ineffaceable influence on the English theatre when the principal members of the Company, including Madame Sarah Bernhardt, visited London in 1871. At the time of my visit, Sarah Bernhardt herself had already resigned her position in the Maison Molière and Coquelin no longer played there regularly.

Mounet Sully still triumphed in the *Œdipe Roi*, and Mlle Bartet gave the last touch of distinction to Comedy by her exquisite diction. Worms—whose 'L'Ami Fritz' was a most perfect piece of secondary acting—Sylvain, the Doyen of the Comédie—de Ferandy now only recently retired from the same position—above all Delaunay, the incomparable interpreter of de Musset—were the principal instructors at the Conservatoire.

Every day the students, chosen for their promise, attended in the quaint little classrooms of the institution. Their training was free, and very generously, a certain number of foreign students were admitted to the same privileges if they showed sufficient talent. Arthur Fayne, Charles Fry's son, was among their

number a few years later, if I remember rightly. The rehearsal rooms consisted of a tiny wooden stage, a little amphitheatre of raised seats, and a Professor's desk of a small platform facing the stage. Nothing had changed, one fancied, since Napoleon, before the walls of Moscow, signed the decree which constituted the charter of the School of Acting.

There was no attempt at a complete production during the weeks of study, though at intervals public tests of a more elaborate character were carried out. Each student presented a part in a particular play, studying every scene essential to the make-up of the rôle. His class comrades 'read' the other characters in the scenes he studied.

From the very beginning a student was more or less fixed in a certain line of parts; the conventional types of the theatre of the day. Comedy, tragedy, leading juvenile, soubrette, heavy lead, etc. That line, in fact, which some particular actor in the Comédie took as his right in all the season's performances. This system of *emploi* was very strictly adhered to by the students themselves; I have heard a student excuse himself from studying a certain part because it was not *dans mon emploi*. Yet it must be clearly understood this was not strictly type-casting, rather a practical anticipation of the possibilities of the student's future career, based on his physical characteristics, vocal quality, height, mental affinities, etc. The student called upon took his place upon the little stage and commenced his scene, running through half a dozen lines. Then some question interrupted him, and here the methods of the professors differed greatly. One insisted on the closest possible imitation of his own intonation, pace and cadence. Worms had masterly power of drawing out from the student his own conception of the part by adroit

questioning.¹ Delaunay, then in his seventieth year, sat for a while pensively watching the young aspirant and then poured out a flood of reminiscence, criticism, illustration which seemed to embody the whole tradition of the theatre from the days of Molière. Once—I think it was very kindly intended for my own benefit—after trying in vain to infuse into the minds of two stumpy young Parisians, very modern in type, some idea of the distinction and style required by Valère and Eraste in the *Dépit Amoureux*, he regarded them for a moment in silence and then rose very slowly and walked down the room with his little mocking smile, 'Allons, les enfants. Il faudra vous montrer ça.' Then, suddenly straightening himself, he sprang with one leap on to the stage, and, as he turned, the years fell off and the voice whose charm had first given life to de Musset's Comedy heroes fell into the rhyming lilt of the third scene.

Eh, Bien ! Seigneur Valère ?
Eh ! Bien ! Seigneur Eraste ?
En quel état l'amour ?
En quel état vos feux ?
Plus forts de jour en jour,
Et mon amour plus fort.

He held the secret of movement in the courtly mockery of grace which is a lost art on the English stage to-day. He insisted always that no gesture might lose the sense of period, old or modern, of character, or of situation.

'Il faut savoir s'habiller du rôle'

was his favourite maxim for bearing and action. To wait till you had your costume on in order to realise the semblance of a character seemed to him, as indeed it is, a confession of incompetence.

¹ See page 60 for Coquelin's views on these points.

It is important in reading Coquelin's monograph to remember what was insisted on even more fully by Dupont Vernon, who had only recently retired from the Conservatoire—his book being still the accepted text-book there: for every phrase there was only one determinable inflection:

'La seule inflexion juste'

which, when once found, should never be allowed to vary. This teaching of fixed inflection was probably the weakest part of the method employed, yet it must be admitted that it is almost essential to the true delivery of French verse, especially in comedy.

The basic lyric cadence of the Alexandrine is found in its four major tonic accents:

One two three four five six One two three four five six



No English writer, with the single exception of Robert Bridges in *The Testament of Beauty*, has ever captured this lilt. For it must be remembered that the verse accent in French is marked largely by pitch, while stress is used to convey the logical meaning. The exact opposite is true in English verse (except in the case of *Lilts*), for here the verse pattern is marked by isochronous stresses, and inflection indicates the logical significance of the lines.

The unalterable pulse of all French dramatic verse, whether classic or romantic in spirit, may not be interrupted by dialogue.

¹ 'Matapan de Bergame?' 'Tu l'as connu?' 'Beaucoup;

C'est moi qui l'ai tué.' 'La botte est sans rispote.'

¹ *L'Aventurière*, Augier.

The monotony of the cadence is broken by the most complete system of counterpointed stresses and modulations, with a special power of rhetorical climax, due to the equal division of the half-lines of the Alexandrine. A similar necessity in regard to the heroic couplet of eighteenth-century English verse, actually developed here that mechanical art of elocution, fundamentally alien to our stress verse—which has laid so heavy a burden on the Shakespearean stage. The peculiar magic of Shakespeare's verse, its capacity for indicating completely the variation of character, and even of sex, is foreign to classic verse; type rather than individuality has always marked the tragic theatre of France, and in reaction from this, its comedy has more than any other depended for its perfection on an incredible mastery of character acting; not in the coarse sense in which that term is used on the English stage, but in the exact sense in which Coquelin employs it; the moulding of the actor's personality by his intelligence and his technique into the very idiosyncrasies of the part, rather than the selective bringing back to himself of those elements in the character portrayed, which he naturally possesses or can experience—what we in England call 'straight' acting.

The most perfect analysis of this contrast was given me by Leslie Faber, who almost alone on the modern stage seemed to possess equal power in both forms of acting. He often said: 'There are no parts that are not straight parts, provided the actor has sufficient imagination, range of expression and sympathy with life.' The assumption of a character by an imitation of its externals and the twisting of one's physique into odd and picturesque eccentricity—what we call character acting—is, as Coquelin really suggests, the outer skin of impersonation only.

There is a story that a Japanese actor of the 'Noh' plays once saw his adopted son and successor following an old woman in the street and copying her gait. He asked what the boy was doing, and received an answer which showed that he hoped in this way to become a fine actor of old women's parts. 'So will you never play in the "Noh." ' said the father. 'Within your mind you must call up the conviction that you *are* old and all the externals will follow.'

For the trained actor, where Coquelin's Number Two is the perfect servant of his Number One this is true. Those who saw Leslie Faber create the old Scots doctor of *The Ringer* and, almost in view of the audience, transform himself again into his own graceful and debonair self, will understand the truth of this matter and of the long and painful self-discipline necessary for its achievement; what poles apart from the insufferable self-exploitation of the untrained 'type-actor,' who can only play what he 'feels' and always reminds one of dear Phoebe in *Quality Street*, who overcame her deficiencies in arithmetic by working it out 'in real herrings.'

The greater part of *L'Art du Comédien* is concerned with this question of real or simulated emotion, 'reserve' or 'letting go.'

Modern psychology makes it easier to understand conflicting theories of emotional and mental acting. We are aware that our consciousness is much more than dual. Certain actions, notably the technique of an art, like playing the violin or acting a tragic part, can become and remain subconscious yet absolutely controlled by the 'watcher' in the brain. While on the other hand the concurrent emotional delight in the perfect performance of an artistic masterpiece may inspire the musician or the actor with feelings almost

as intense as the reality of experience. It is the exhaustion of carrying through a great technical feat of physical or mental expression, and the reaction from the train of simulating emotional experience, which sends an artist stumbling and exhausted from the stage. That this, and not an absurd effort to 'experience' the emotional reality of the part, was beneath the so-called temperamental acting of Mme Sarah Bernhardt, I once had a curious proof. The actor playing Scarpia in *La Tosca* had fallen on the stage in such a manner that the edge of his large lace collar lay against his lips and moved to and fro under the somewhat gusty breathing of the portly corpse. The audience had just given that tiny stir which tells that 'something has gone wrong' as Mme Bernhardt stooped to place the candles round her dead persecutor. To have touched the lace would have shown consciousness that something was amiss and might even have dissolved the great moment of the play into a giggle. As she placed her candles her arm swept across in such a manner that the long sleeve of her dress drew the lace back into its proper place. I am persuaded she was not less but more exhausted by the emotional effort which the part had entailed on that particular occasion, because she had dealt so swiftly with the emergency. It might almost with equal truth be argued that the really perfect technique becomes unconscious during rehearsal study, and that the actor is free 'to let himself go' emotionally if that method calls out his greatest gifts.

Among the greatest figures in the dramatic world of the day was unquestionably Got. He was the only actor I have ever seen who could give life to the heavier creations of the Romantic period. Notably to the awe-inspiring dullness of *Les Burgraves*, one of Victor Hugo's most gloomy dramas.

A few nights before, I had seen him in a tiny part in a play which I have forgotten, as a rather boorish Bohemian, attempting social success, and humiliated by the sudden appearance of the most disreputable pipe ever seen, which dropped from his pocket at a critical moment. Left alone on the stage, he drew forth the offending implement and gazed at it long and reproachfully. Then, with admonitory forefinger, observed, 'Toi, je ne te mène plus dans le monde.' The triviality of the sentence seemed to give him his opportunity, and the curtain fell to that long-drawn chuckle of delight which is surely the supreme tribute the comedian can achieve.

Now he was to represent the strange figure of a tragic beggar, something after the manner of the returning Odysseus, buffeted in the hall of his enemies—rebellious Thanes of the Teutonic confederation—and championed only by one blameless and heroic youth, presently himself in need of a second to support his claim to the right of trial by ordeal. The actor had stumbled through the scene, an inert mass of rags, never once really showing his face to the audience, till the moment of the challenge came, and the beggar came forward as sponsor for the knight. Amid the roar of the mocking Thanes his name was demanded. There was a long pause, and the shambling figure grew before our eyes to the lofty stature of the actor himself. The face seemed to model itself visibly into the grandeur of a Roman effigy, and then there thundered out the terrific Alexandrine of his name.

'Frédéric Barberousse, Empereur d'Allemagne.'

A moment or two after, the cowed rebels were listening to what is possibly the longest 'tirade' in French drama. It lasted, I was told, some seven minutes

as Got delivered it, at full speed, and is little more than a catalogue of names and achievements. From the beginning growing excitement seemed to grip the house. Names, epithets, events formed a great instrumental symphony in our ears, and the thunder of the last line, never loud but always working to a predestined climax, seemed merely to echo in such applause as can only be heard to-day at the end of an operatic masterpiece. For that is what these performances actually were. The plays were familiar, more familiar than Shakespeare was to us twenty years ago. It was not the plot that interested the audience; it was what I may call the instrumentalism of the actors, and in it one forgot everything.

The memory of single lines is still as clear to me as on the day that I first heard them. Even Mounet's first word, 'Enfants,' as he stood before the lofty temple of Thebes, seemed to include the vast audience in the crowd of plague-stricken wretches who cried out to him. Reinhardt made of the same opening a spectacle of tensely waving arms, rigid in a cubist design, etched upwards to a tiny distant figure without dignity or pathos. It was a thousand times more expensive and complicated than the actor's voice. Did it move one as much?

The chief fault of the Conservatoire training was in its absence of definite technical principles. Everything that was to be taught, with the exception of a little very unsatisfactory movement, was taught *ad hoc*. Voice, articulation, gesture, even the history of the theatre, were dinned into the pupils during the study of an actual part. Many students took singing lessons, and here again there was insufficient technical foundation.

It is my belief that this method of training is what has prejudiced the theatre against the whole question

of dramatic schools. It is as if a student were to stop in the middle of a Beethoven sonata to tune the piano, and were to use a Chopin Nocturne as an exercise to supple his fingers.

A student cannot 'learn to act,' but he cannot discover whether he possesses the power of acting without experiment. Perhaps one in a thousand, gifted to perfection, requires no further training, though I own to have never met that person, and I have found that the greatest artists of our stage are those who return again and again, as a singer does, for vocal and articulatory study.

The average student has a stiff uncontrolled body, a mind preoccupied with self, and a voice utterly beyond his own control. First he must acquire the power of good speech at all times and under all conditions, not on the stage alone, and similarly of good movement. After that he must mentally train himself to regard acting and the theatre as a real occupation for his whole personality, and must gain the peculiar mental attitude which gives dignity and simplicity to work. Then he must practise every grade of speech and adapt his own personality to it. Meanwhile he may be allowed to acquire the primary rhythm of the stage which is the power of creating its curious illusion; an illusion of space, an illusion of time, an illusion of power, which varies in every part, in every scene, in every play; and when progress in these things has reached a certain stage he is ready to attempt original work, by playing on his instrument through the medium of an important part.

The defect of the Conservatoire method was to give the impression that there was a certain secret of style and interpretation which was handed on by a teacher and impressed upon a pupil, and which consisted

almost altogether of tricks; tricks of voice, tricks of movement, above all tricks of business—the most dangerous snare of the accomplished actor.

Coquelin, perhaps the finest brain that ever worked in that school, saw all this, but it needed the union of true educational methods and artistic inspiration to avoid the dangers of which he was conscious.

A similar change has taken place in the teaching of drawing. We are all agreed that painting cannot be taught, but in olden days the unfortunate student had to produce academic drawings in which the same study was repeated again and again by successive generations of students with a meticulous perfection of shading, 'scumbling,' erasing, until the competition study was ready. Now we get multitudinous rapid studies from every point of view to develop a conception of space, force and time in regard to the visual world, preparing the student for the expression of whatever may be his natural vision and his natural capacity of expression.

Great as is the practical value of all this technical instruction, one is conscious that the secret of the actor's success does not lie in any of these things, but rather in the development of that gift of supreme 'make believe,' innate in the human mind, out of which grew myth and art; the power which governed the life of Odysseus of old; which made the great geniuses, the saints, the scoundrels of history; the faculty of projecting one's whole personality on to an imaginative plane where life is re-created to our will, as opposed to the real plane which dominates, cribs, cabins and confines our will. This is why people want to go on the stage and are miserable, and even die, if they cannot. This is the emotional concentration by which imagination controls the whole field of action, mental and physical.

The stage distorts every perspective; sometimes—as in the old raked enclosed stages with wings, flies, battens, footlights and two-dimensional scenery—so narrowly that no outsized personality could stand straight or move sensibly within its four walls; sometimes cunningly devised—as in our modern art settings, light planes and realistic interiors—to give solidity to the whole action. The former with all its faults helped by stimulating the imagination of the audience and lulled its sense of reality to sleep. The latter with all its marvels threatens to destroy our sense of fundamental rhythm in the theatre and substitute for it a monotonous realism which enervates all action.

Coquelin's genius for detail made him one of the greatest interpretative actors of all time. He did not, as this book fully makes clear, sink his individuality in his part, but it was so wide and universal in understanding that his range became phenomenal. His supreme achievement remains *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a play worthy of his genius, perhaps the first modern play he acted in of which that can truly be affirmed.

The French theatre inherits the dual Latin tradition. A closet tragedy which requires declamation rather than acting; a style which has seen Greece through Latin spectacles and never moved freely in characterisation. A 'scenario' comedy, into which the actor pours his accomplished craft to give it life, but which has no merit other than to serve as his vehicle. Once only the genius of Molière, transcending that of Shakespeare in construction, and in the power of social satire, fused this 'Comedia del Arte' form in which he learnt his trade with the universal art of the theatre, and produced the masterpieces which are the glory of the French stage. The romantic melodrama of Hugo is most perfectly summed up by Coquelin, and he appreciates

the lyric perfection of de Musset which Delaunay alone had the power to temper into dramatic form; while Coquelin had always an undertone of nasality, Delaunay's speech was most exquisite. His interpretation of the *Nuit de Mai*, which I only heard him read, not act, remains the finest example of verse-speaking in my memory. Like Molière's La Grange, whose *emploi* he filled, and whom he often represented in the birthday ceremonies, he was the perfect actor, slim, tall, distinguished, a more delicate and lyric Charles Wyndham. Coquelin's use of his voice was dramatically beautiful, and he could achieve short moments of musical quality, as anyone will agree who can remember the dying Cyrano's cry :

Non, non, mon cher amour!
Je ne vous aimais pas.

But he never seemed to have overcome the wide-mouth position so common in French comic actors, and only the trombone of Cyrano himself seemed adequate to account for some of his nasal resonances. One felt him to be by nature a 'character' actor, who by force of genius had achieved directness and sincerity.

The fault of the great actors of his day—he admits it himself—was that their enormous technical accomplishment remained at too high a level of consciousness. They concentrated on it during actual performance. The reaction against this has led the modern producer to endeavour to do away with the necessity for any real technical accomplishment whatever, by casting to type; finding for each important part a performer—preferably almost inexperienced—so closely moulded to the character as outlined by the author, and filled in by the stage director, that all that is necessary is for the performer to 'behave' naturally on the stage for

the requisite time and obey the producer's directions on team work.

The result is a decline in all the magnetic intimacy of the theatre; a decline in the actor's professional and economic situation; a slowing down of the rhythm of dramatic construction. Ultimately the economic organisation of the stage must completely break down under the mass of single-part players discarded before they have had time to recover from the heady draught of a first success. For those gifted with the true gift of creation it spells heartbreak.

What seems directly required is a more exact selection, and an infinitely more searching training. Something akin to the work of the Russian ballet schools as Karsavina describes it in *Theatre Street*: to the artist's true training in craftsmanship; the singer's in Italian opera. A training which in the selected group shall give a perfect automatic control of mind and body, and enable the artist to concentrate freely on the mental conception of a part, secure that limbs, face, voice, diction, bearing and stage rhythm will adapt themselves to the intention of the mind as a skater's body does to his swing, or a dancer's to his musical pattern.

Behind this we need an education in the whole history and extent of the art of the theatre. It is a commonplace that by the time most actors have acquired these things, practically haphazard, with many stumblings and false starts, they are too old to play the parts which cry out for such accomplishment.

An exhaustive vocal training which sets the voice in tune and leaves it safe from all mischance in any type of delivery; a physical training which will guarantee health, discipline and beauty throughout all the course of an artist's career; diction which can translate speech rhythm with the same accuracy as a singer can trans-

late a musical line; style based on a knowledge of period, in drama, and of technical production; all this acquired early under conditions of deliberate experimental study, not by the accident of long runs which breed lethargy, and single week runs which mean racked nerves and economic disaster.

Those who saw the incomparable 'Compagnie des Quinze' in *Lucrèce* or *La Marne* recognised the method for which the theatre is seeking in one at least of its manifestations.

Out of this comes that imaginative projection into the illusion of space, the illusion of time, the illusion of force which give the rhythmic movement of that world into which the actor steps as he makes his entrance; in that alone the public have any concern with him or with his affairs. No action within the three real and one imagined wall of the stage, no word spoken, no gesture made, is carried through in the time, with the force, or through the spacial extent and direction of actual life. To know this individually is to have the 'sense of the stage,' to respond to it in others is to have the gift of team work. To ignore it as the modern producers tend to do is chaos, not art.

Then please, ladies and gentlemen, give us a National Theatre in which to study what acting can be, and we may help you to save the world.



C. COQUELIN
THE ART OF THE ACTOR

SIX years ago I published a short pamphlet—*Art and the Actor*—in which I attempted to demonstrate the claim of the actor to be considered an artist in the same sense as the painter and the musician; and to prove that the old-world prejudice which still attaches to his calling has no shadow of justification in the democratic times we live in.

Did I prove my case? It is not for me to affirm so much. At least I can say that all my conclusions were not disproved, since not long after the publication of my pamphlet the tradition which forbade the award of any decoration to an actor received its first blow—followed, thank Heaven, by a number of others which encourage me to hope for its final overthrow. By the award of the Legion of Honour, the actor Moière, in the person of his successor, has been definitely proclaimed *dignus intrare*.

According to the measure of my powers I have therefore shown elsewhere that the actor's calling is that of an artist; in these present notes I wish to study that art in itself, inquiring into its conditions, laying down the principles of its rightful practice—those at least which I consider to be such from my own experience extending, I repeat, over a period of thirty years.

I DEFINE art in general as a composition in which a great measure of poetry clothes and makes acceptable an even greater measure of truth.

To accomplish this work the painter has at his disposal a canvas and his brushes; the sculptor clay and his modelling tools; the poet has speech and his gift of song; that is, rhythm, metre and rhyme. The arts differ according to the nature of their medium; well, the actor's medium is—himself.

His own face, his body, his life is the material of his art; the thing he works and moulds to draw out from it his creation.

From this it follows the existence of the comedian must be dual. One part of him is the performer, the instrumentalist; another, the instrument to be played on.

'Number One' conceives the character to be created, or rather, since it is in fact the creation of the author, sees it as the author has drawn it. As Tartuffe, or Hamlet, Arnolfe or Romeo; this model 'Number Two' realises in his own person.

The characteristic gift of the actor is in this dualism. It is true that it exists elsewhere, and my friend Alphonse Daudet delights in discovering it in the person of the story-teller.

The very phrases I am using I have borrowed from him. He too recognises in himself Number One and Number Two; the man, like any other man who loves or hates, rejoices or suffers; the impassive watcher who from above analyses, even at the moment of greatest emotion, observing, taking notes, with an eye to his future creations.

But in the author this dualism is not active as it is in the actor. It is not outwardly apparent. Number One, the author, follows the actions of Number Two, but he does not interfere with them. The actor's Number One on the other hand reacts upon Number Two until he transfigures him into the very creature of his dream; in a word, until he has wrought from himself the work of art he wishes to create.

When the painter is at work upon a portrait he poses his model and with his brush seizes upon all the features of the likeness which his trained vision can grasp. He fixes them on the canvas by the magic of his art and his work is accomplished.

The comedian has one more thing to do; in his own person; he must enter into the portrait; for this likeness must speak, it must act, it must move about within its frame—the stage—giving to the spectator the illusion of the personality itself.

When the actor has a portrait to paint—that is to say, a part to study—he must first, by a careful and repeated reading of the whole play, steep himself in the intentions of the author, disentangle the importance and the reality of the character, realise his plane of action in the plot, see him, in a word, as he *must* be; then, he has obtained his model.

Now, like the painter he realises every feature and fixes the likeness not on canvas, but on himself. He adapts Number Two to express every element of the personality required. He pictures Tartuffe in a certain costume, and he assumes it. He endows him with a certain gait, and adopts it, with certain features, which he reproduces in his own. He controls his own face, his own body; he carves out, cutting and stitching at his own skin until the critic within him, Number One, declares himself satisfied that the result is in reality the

likeness of Tartuffe. But that is not all: so far he has only achieved a superficial likeness, the exterior of his impersonation, not the personality itself; he has got to make Tartuffe speak as he hears him speak, and in order to think out the action of the part he must make himself move, act, gesticulate, listen, think—from the very soul of Tartuffe himself. Only then is the portrait accomplished and ready for its frame—I mean for the stage; then the public will not exclaim as he makes his entrance, ‘Ah! Here comes . . . or . . .’ They will cry out, ‘Here is Tartuffe.’ Otherwise you have failed in your job.

To sum up: first the profound and intimate study of the character; then the calling up by Number One and the reproduction by Number Two of the personality which expresses that character; that is the proper achievement of the actor.

At the same time, like his patron Molière, he takes his goods where he can find them. To complete his likeness he may add to the portrait all those personal characteristics which he has collected in his own observation of life; so Harpagon may be wrought out of a thousand misers all melted and cast together in the mould of a universal identity.

THE two beings which co-exist within the mind of the actor are inseparable; but the master of the two, the seer, must be 'Number One.' He is the soul, the other is the body. He is reason: that reason to which our Chinese friends gave the name of the 'Supreme Governess.' Number Two is to Number One as rhyme to reason: a slave who can only obey.

The greater the mastery the greater the artist.

The ideal would be that this Number Two, this poor 'Brother Body,' should be nothing but a soft mass of putty completely malleable, taking in every part any form required of him. The handsomest of juvenile leads for Romeo; a 'foul bunch-backed toad' for Richard the Third, seducing by the power of his wit alone; in Figaro a ferret of a valet with an impudent grimace audaciously certain of his power.

Then the actor would be universally gifted and, had he but the talent, capable of playing every type; he could *do* all he wished. Alas, that would be too happy a state of things! Nature will not suffer it.

However supple the body, however flexible the physiognomy, neither the one nor the other will lend itself to all the fancies of the artist.

There are many whose physical make-up prevents them from attempting certain parts which they are nevertheless quite capable of conceiving and teaching; many confined irremediably to a certain type of part; there are others on whom their refractory Number Two, or rather their personal individuality, exercises so great an empire that they can never escape from it; and instead of throwing themselves into a part and putting on its semblance it is the part which must yield to

them and put on their own likeness.¹ The chief drawback to this method is that the player remains a one-part actor. So Félix created only a succession of Félixes; so, up to a certain point, M. Mounet Sully 'Mounetised' in his own image all his impersonations.

To this may be attributed his incontestable superiority in Hamlet. He is himself a Hamlet. He has in real life that strain of profound melancholy broken by a harsh abruptness, those bitter ironies, balanced by a subtle tenderness, those desperate escapes into a world of dreams. Consequently the more completely he remains Mounet Sully in Hamlet, the finer is his performance. This is why the interpretation of the part has been for him the crown of a career not indeed lacking in great triumphs. But here is the other side of the shield:

I will venture to record one incident in order to make my meaning clear. Mounet was rehearsing Horace. I was officer in charge for the week. After the famous scene of the second Act, I took him aside.

'My dear Mounet, this is not meant either as a lesson or as a piece of good advice. Your conception of the part is your own and you will maintain it before the public, who, I am sure, will applaud you; one remark only I want to make. In flooding with tears the famous line:

Albe vous a nommé; je ne vous connois plus,²

do you not feel that you destroy the contrast between Horace and Curiace, and so the whole point of the scene which is built up entirely on that contrast?"

'You are quite right,' answered Mounet frankly, 'but

¹ This was Duse's method and is the general method of nearly all the most admired actors of our day.—E. F.

² 'Alba has named your name; henceforth I know you not.'

it can't be helped. I feel that Corneille has not made the character of Horace sufficiently human.'

Here you see plainly the ego of the actor usurping that of the part he is playing: Mounet is himself a poet, and understands poets better than most people. He sees Corneille's intention perfectly, but his too sympathetic nature refuses to lend itself to that intention and he finds himself compelled, in order to play the part, to modify it in the direction of his own natural self.

Another consequence of this method of interpretation is that logically it involves neglect of the inward study of characterisation—the most important of all studies in my judgment—in favour of external and picturesque detail.

We must not despise the picturesque, but it is wrong to be exclusively preoccupied with it; above all we must not make it our starting-point in building up a part, basing it on some graphic trait which is supposedly authentic. Character is the basis of everything in acting.

Have within you the spirit of your part and you will naturally deduce all its externals; the pictorial effects, if they come, will adjust themselves spontaneously to it. The soul creates the body, not the body the soul.

If Mephistopheles is hideous it is because his soul is monstrous. I saw the part finely played at Vienna by Lewinski, who made him a limping hunchback, an exterior appropriate to the character. But is it appropriate for Mephistophles never to make a gesture which is not picturesque, and to pose, as if in front of the camera, at every line he declaims? Should the puppet play the actor off the stage? No. Nature is not so decorative as all that. Such a method leads pretty quickly to caricature, or at least to a fixed convention.

Even from the point of view of immediate success it is a mistake. Nothing wears off so quickly as the

impression made by an exterior that is merely picturesque; as soon as your entrance is over the public forgets all about it. The effect fades unless it is supplemented by diction, by characterisation—in a word, by style. I go further: if by too great attention to external characterisation you succeed in reproducing a pose, a mere trick of bearing or of feature, an eccentricity. Oh, be careful! Instead of amusing you will weary your public, and having laughed once, irritation will quickly follow the repetition of such an effect, and you will be made to feel it in the most disagreeable manner.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not question the art of re-creating from Nature herself those individual peculiarities which unconsciously betray the inner man; on the contrary, it is one of the gifts of the actor to realise and reproduce in a flash everything of the kind which can be made effective in the theatre; but selection should retain only points of real significance, and they must be adapted with discretion to the whole conception of the part, eschewing, for instance, those which are peculiarly individual. For example: the faithful reproduction of some one particular miser known to us, but unfamiliar to the audience, when we wish to delineate Harpagon, who embodies within himself the typical qualities of every miser, and so cannot fail to be recognised as what he is. We had one astounding actor in this art of perfect characterisation, Lesueur. No one ever made Number Two work as he did. No one ever bodied forth from his own personality characters so diverse and of so intense an expressiveness; his reproduction was prodigious in its exhaustiveness; and what a passion for research!

He retired into a kind of 'dark-room' with closed and curtained windows surrounded by his paints, his wigs, all the tools of his trade; there, alone, by artificial light in front of his mirrors he worked at his facial make-up; making for himself twenty-hundred different exteriors before arriving at the real thing he required; the one that satisfied his own mind and convinced him of its truth. When finally, with a last stroke of the pencil, he completed the likeness (he would spend hours on a single wrinkle) the result was marvellous. Lovers of the theatre will never forget his doper in *The*

Lunatics, his old gentleman in *The Game of Piquet*. He was M. Poirier,¹ the middle-class self-made man; Don Quixote, the type of errant and starveling knighthood.

When he made his entrance in the latter character his height, which was barely average, seemed as if it stretched into infinity. He reached up to the whole length of his lance, it was the hero of Cervantes in all the melancholy of his interminable leanness.

With this extraordinary talent, fed by the intensive study of every part, he lacked—dare I say it—one thing in order to achieve complete illusion—vocal power. He was unable to vary his voice; in every part it was the voice of Lesueur, very comic but unvaryingly comic; his articulation was terribly heavy in *The Watchmaker*; he had to say, ‘Monsieur, Madame me désire.’ It came out, ‘Monsieur, Madamuh me desierees.’

Articulation is the draftsmanship of diction; one phrase of Samson, articulated as he knew how to do it, expressed as much in character-drawing as a pencil sketch by Ingres.

When that incomparable master of the art of speech played in *Mlle de la Seiglière*, only to hear him put the question, ‘Jasmin, Madame la Baronne de Vaubert has not yet arrived?’ called up the man before one’s closed eyes; the insolent fine gentleman for whom Jasmin is only a dummy; the empty-headed émigré to whom the absence of Madame la Baronne de Vaubert would be a matter of complete indifference, if that inexactitude on her part had not the fatal consequence of making him wait for breakfast. When he spoke of Bonaparte—of *M. de Buonaparte*, I should say, since *M. de la Seiglière* was condescending enough to make the Emperor a gentleman and a marquis—having remained deaf to the

¹ *Le Genre de M. Poirier.*

advances of this poor Buonaparte who had won his victories with no other intention but to annoy him! in his simple framing of the syllables all the childish self-sufficiency of the personage, all his intractable pride of race seemed to be revealed.

The power of vocal inflection is incalculable and all the visual effects in the world are nothing worth, when it comes to moving the hearts of an audience, in comparison to one cry uttered with true intensity of intonation.

It is therefore on articulation that the actor must concentrate his first effort; here is at once the A B C and the highest achievement of our art. We must begin with the study of articulation as children begin with courtesy, because articulation is the courtesy of the actor as punctuality is the courtesy of kings, and having begun with it, we must study it all our lives.

I say that it is a courtesy, for it is plain that in addressing oneself to the public it is desirable we should make them understand us, and therefore crisp articulation is an essential.

Ah! but what about speaking naturally, I shall be asked—is that not essential? Don't talk to me of the natural speech of those who will not take the trouble to articulate. They chat before the public as they might do at meals, interrupting and repeating themselves, correcting themselves, chewing their words as they might the end of a cigar; gabbling, that is the right term: turning the style of their author into 'pidgin'¹ talk, minced fine like forced meat.

The theatre is not a drawing-room; it is absurd to address an audience of fifteen hundred in a theatre as if one were talking to a few friends in the chimney-corner; without increase of tone inaudibility is certain, without clear articulation we shall be unintelligible.

I know that an actor can make a great reputation for naturalness by affecting a conversational tone; no word is stressed more than another, every sentence drops, he splutters, abbreviates, seems to be hunting for his

¹Org. *Pétit nègre*=Hottentotism, the speech of a type of the mentally defective.

words, repeats them three or four times, hems and haws for ten minutes, then scampers over his recital to make an effect, and the sheep-like public exclaims: ‘Heavens, isn’t he natural! One would think he was chatting at home. . . . What an actor! . . . I couldn’t hear, could you? But how natural it was.’

Only remember you must not put your trust in this. If by any chance the play interests the listener more than the actor, and if he is really anxious to understand, one day, when he finds it too tiring to try to follow, he will lose his temper and cry out, ‘Speak up! Speak up, can’t you!’ And he will be completely disillusioned. It is in speaking verse especially—under this pretext of being natural—that the actor breaks the movement of the couplet, slurs the rhyme, repeats words so that they add several feet of his own making to the hemistich, treats the verse of Molière or Regnard as if it were the prose of M. Scribe—oh, then, beware of disaster! Actors of this type—and there are many notable ones—are condemned to ephemeral and topical plays, repertory is closed to them.¹ Where style is wanting there is no art.

It must be said definitely the duty of the actor is to respect his text; in whatever manner he delivers it he must speak what the author has written, nothing more, nothing less. If it is unseemly to transform by bad diction a vigorous, colourful, individual prose into common, insipid, feeble pulp; if indeed this is a kind of betrayal, how much worse when such a betrayal becomes deliberate, and presents to the public under

¹ By ‘repertory’ here is meant the group of classical plays kept constantly in the bill of the National Theatre, and forming the chief reason for its existence. Success in these—contrary to English custom—ranked higher than the creation of new parts.

cover of an illustrious name some bastard phantasy of the actor's own begetting.

What would be left of our national drama if during the last two centuries actors had allowed themselves such liberties? With the help of tradition, with every performer wishing to profit at once by everything that his predecessors had found effective, while at the same time adding new touches of his own devising, the masterpieces of our language would be reduced to a kind of mosaic, from which it would be necessary to chip off Baron, Préville, Fleury, Molé, Monvel, etc., before reaching the original Molière.

It is not less impertinent to impose oneself on living authors! A kind of inverted plagiarism; inexcusable even when it succeeds. I am not sure that even the pantomime authors are really delighted with the puns and gags which their interpreters tack on to their parts. Often they must seem in the most detestable taste, and if the public laughs without discerning the trick, it must seem utterly brainless. These criticisms, I must hasten to add, would be too severe if they were applied to certain pieces of 'business,' certain traditional actions, consecrated by long use and possibly sometimes going back to the production of the author himself. Even here to my mind only those which are unquestionably sound and completely suited to the character of the play should be retained.

For example, is it wanting in respect for Molière to add a clowning commentary to the impromptu in the *Précieuses ridicules*? Certainly not. The author has given us an 'etcetera' which authorises such a liberty; and it is not the only place where he has deliberately left something to the fancy of the interpreter.¹ Molière

¹ Coquelin's own delicious clowning in the 'Mamamouchi' of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was a good example of this.

himself, we know, sometimes improvised whole scenes and it is possible that tradition has transmitted some of them to us. The same thing is true of Marivaux, whose plays still derive from the Italian comedy¹, and whose Frontin was originally Harlequin. With Beaumarchais, on the contrary, always so studied, so precise, I will admit no *fioriture*: at the most I would pass in the famous discussion on the two words 'and' and 'or' Brid'oison's cacophonic interrogation which is almost canonical:

'Y a-t-il 'Et' . . . ou . . . 'ou' . . . où?' ²

But in Molière no more than in Beaumarchais may such liberties be taken with a masterpiece; the actor's integrity refuses to let him be wittier than his author.

¹ *Comedia del Arte*.

² The sense gives 'Is it "and" . . . or . . . "or" . . . where?'

I FEAR the assertion may seem commonplace, but there are actors who never seem so happy and never think they are acting so well as when, without materially modifying their text, they can succeed in introducing into it something different from the author's intention. A few years ago the first night of a poetical drama by one of our most popular academicians was taking place, the play was being applauded to the skies. A critic of my acquaintance came into the dressing-room of the leading actor and congratulated him warmly. 'You interpreted your part in a most admirable way,' he said. At these words somebody whom the critic had not noticed sprang indignantly to his feet. It was a friend of the actor, also a player. 'Interpreted,' he exclaimed, 'say that he went utterly beyond it.'

The phrase expresses a complete theory, and much may be said to excuse it. We may ask whether by right of their genius some great actors cannot in a certain sense transcend the characters they play; whether they cannot breathe into them their own spirit and the spirit of their own day and so give to the poet's creation a significance he could not foresee, different certainly, and possibly stronger and more profound than the original.

As an example we may take Frédérick building up out of a common character of melodrama his astounding Robert Macaire.¹ I shall be reminded of the effect he produced in certain parts where there was nothing in the way of material, and where he had everything to do.

¹ The English equivalent would be Henry Irving in *The Bells* and in *The Lyons Mail*.—E. F.

I know all that, and take account of it; but here we have the case of an exceptional actor and a third- or fourth-rate author. One cannot deduce a general rule from such an instance, and to my mind the theory is an infinitely dangerous one; substituting for the profound and serious study of a part the more or less unruly fancy of the player, his mind which nobody wants, for the mind of Corneille or Shakespeare, which it is his business to realise before the eyes of the spectators. *To go beyond* Horace, Hermione, Macbeth, Lear, Hamlet? That seems to me a strange ambition. Is it even such a little matter simply to attain to them?

Mr. Irving himself, well as he knows his Shakespeare, is said to have been mistaken in his reading of Macbeth. The Macbeth he gave us, I quote here the appreciation of a judge, also at the same time one of his admirers, 'Is no longer the man, weak yet violent, too full of the milk of human kindness to plunge straightforwardly into crime; he is the scoundrel; frank, but mean-spirited, whom no question of honour arrests, only fear of the future and the danger of discovery.'

If Mr. Irving can be mistaken in the interpretation of a Shakespearean rôle, who can hope to succeed? Is it not enough to dedicate all one's talent, one's genius even if that exists, to set up quite simply the figure of which the poet dreamed? It is just this desire to go beyond Molière which has given us a tragic Arnolphe, a revolutionary Alceste, a Tartuffe who is handsome, seductive, terrible, and other idle fancies of our day.

To do just what Shakespeare dreamed, to play Arnolphe as Molière played him, even that is, I repeat, not quite an easy matter; in the most clearly determined of their characters how many sides are still shadowy. What task can be more difficult and more glorious than to draw out these complex personalities,

stirred by so many conflicting passions, with souls like our own, obscured in so many points, and to make them pass from the printed page on to the stage—that is to say, into life. The reader finds it easy, book in hand, to call up for himself the vision, such as it is, of some particular character; a vision often fugitive enough to make it difficult for him to fix its true outline. The phantom in his mind in any case is not the same as that of his neighbour; for the third reader there will be a third shadow, all floating and diverse. But if our three readers go to the theatre and there see the character through the features of an actor of genius, henceforward they can see him in no other way; the shadows will give way to a living being.

Again this glorious result which links the actor and the poet is not easy to obtain, even when small parts are in question, especially if one can claim to be only a modest actor in the second rank; one cannot find the true thought of the author, or having found it one has all the trouble in the world to make the public accept it, if, in reading the play, they have formed for themselves a different conception. I come back again to an instance which I ask permission to relate, although it is a personal one. It was when we were putting on *Fantasio*—one of the latest of de Musset's plays to receive recognition. Musset was dead; his brother Paul directed the rehearsal. I had been entrusted with the part of Prince of Mantua, and I was not without perplexities. Fundamentally what was this idiotic type? Surely more stupid than natural. M. Paul de Musset, whom I consulted, gave me his brother's ideas on the subject. M. Edouard Thierry, our producer, added some fine points of observation as a poet and a man of the theatre. Finally, Davesnes, our old registrar, an impeccable adviser whose counsels Samson and Régnier

always listened to. Davesnes said to me, 'No one but Potier could play that part.' He gave me twenty points in the work of this great comedian, imitated him in twenty parts, made me see, or at least guess, what he would have been like in the Prince of Mantua. Under this guidance and with clear understanding of my text I built up my good gentleman; on the day of the dress rehearsal I had the delight of seeing my advisers come up to me, applauding, their eyes full of tears from the excess of their laughter. 'A certain success,' they told me. Quite so! it was an utter fiasco! and in all the Press a chorus of blame; unanimously, or almost unanimously, with the exception of Gautier and St. Victor, I was attainted and condemned for not having understood one word of my part. At the second performance—the highbrows are still in the majority on second nights—the same lack of success. I was in despair. Penitently I betook myself to M. de Musset and M. Thierry to ask them what I had better do. All agreed in answering: 'Nothing. It is you who are right,' said M. de Musset. 'You play the part as my brother imagined it. He wanted a caricature of romanticism and of its truculent stage tyrants. Go on. Success will come.' In fact, it came, and in the following performances the public was amused by my excesses; and the Prince of Mantua 'according to Musset' was much applauded. I felt, however, that it would be a good thing to get my mind clear on the subject, and I went to see several of my critics, among those who had been most opposed to me. Well, their opposition was due to this: all of them, before going to the theatre, had taken the precaution of re-reading the play and had created for themselves a type of the character; most of them had seen an honest man, majestically idiotic, full of authority, ferociously stupid, but quite serious,

poised and sincere, a contemporary alive in the present time.

Hence the misunderstanding. The interpretation which M. Paul de Musset had suggested to me had upset the interpretation of these gentlemen, and of course the fault was felt to be mine.

To return to articulation, I sum up my views in one phrase; we must not talk as we talk every day, we must speak, with truth and naturalness—then it will be good speech—but still speech.

For speaking is in a certain sense talking—never must it mean chaunting—but it implies giving to the phrases and to all essential words their true value, here with the lightness of a feather, there, on the contrary, with the whole weight of a vocal inflection; distributing the planes of speech, its reliefs, its lights and shadows, modelling our utterance.

The phrase which slips away in the level tones of daily chat becomes supple when it is truly spoken; takes form, becomes a thing of art.

One must add at the risk of contradiction that there must be no excess; an actor whose diction is too marked, who emphasises every detail, who cannot content himself with broad levels out of which he can afterwards build up important points, is still a bad actor.

If the pursuit of nature at any cost is an affectation, so is the effort to make the artist felt at every point.

Chatting is not enough; emphasis on diction at every point is too much. Truth lies between the two.

The essential thing is to be understood. And that is why one must accustom oneself not to go too fast. Volubility leads to gabbling. Such advice will come as a surprise from me. I am generally thought to hurry rather than to slacken the movement of speech, and it is not *andante*, it is *presto*, even *prestissimo*, that I deliver the narrative passage in *L'Étourdi*.¹

¹ *L'Étourdi* (Molière), Act V, Sc. 14.

All that is true, but I do not speak the monologue of Figaro at the same pace¹, yet I do not think that I weary the attention of my hearers by bringing out all its details as I do, any more than I baffle it in hurrying through Mascarille's narrative; neither do I miss one word in doing so. I have in fact most carefully followed the advice 'Never hurry.' Régnier, from whom I took it, expressed himself more or less as follows: 'When you say to yourself "Heavens, how slow I am! Shall I ever get through? This must be unutterably tedious." Then only are you beginning not to go too fast.' Of course, he did not mean that it is not necessary at times to clear away superfluous phrases², but he wanted to learn how to do it without becoming indistinct. One must remain distinct at the most rapid pace, an effect which can be obtained only by the slowest syllabic practice, never hammering out the words, and always measuring the carrying power of the voice according to the space in which one has to speak—a most important thing! It is not necessary to roll out thunderous periods in a drawing-room, or sigh like an Aeolian harp in some enormous hall; good and rhythmic diction gives to the baldest prose a kind of poetry which at the end of a passage seldom fails to call out applause; the maintenance of proper pace and movement is the great law of diction. I insist on the necessity of being clearly understood, but the movement of the words makes them comprehensible quite as much as their articulation. Provost used to say in jest that one night as he was finishing one of the great speeches in *Hippolitus*, closely followed by a breathless public, his memory suddenly failed just before the last two lines. It was

¹ Beaumarchais's *Mariage de Figaro*.

² The meaning is plainly that the rhythm must be unbroken though the pace is quickened.

impossible to check the pace to listen for the prompter. In a flash he took his decision: with magnificent impetuosity, without pausing for breath he fired off two Alexandrines, made up of some Volapuk or other of which the audience of course understood not a word, but which they applauded with frenzy; so thoroughly did gesture, intonation and the movement of the lines make clear the significance of this improvised jargon.

VII

I HAVE spoken of the voice; let me say further: the voice does not need less work than the study of outward expression; in the whole of Number Two this is the thing which must be most flexible, most glowing, most rich in the power of variety; according as the part requires it must be wheedling, canting, insinuating, mocking, impudent, piercing, ardent, tender, tearful. It must range from the flute to the trumpet.

There is the voice of lovers which is not the voice of the family solicitor. Iago has not the voice of Figaro, nor has Figaro the voice of Tartuffe. The quality, the key, the range, differ according to the character. As Madelon says, there is a touch of the chromatic in it.¹ To sum up: in articulation, in diction, in tone, draw, outline your character, make him visible even to the blind.

Let all this be added to the care which you are going to give to the externals of your part; with the same minuteness as Lesueur if you will, but also with the same sincerity, always concerning yourself I mean with the underlying basis of what you do, since externals are but an illustration of that fundamental character which they must make visible without deforming it by exaggeration.

Physique, gesture, voice, each must blend into a perfect unity.

As a matter of fact parts the easiest in appearance are often those which oblige the actor to transform himself most effectively. Take that of Thouvenin in *Denise*. Thouvenin takes no part in the actual action of the

¹ Madelon, 'Il y a de la chromatique la dedans.' 'Les Précieuses ridicules,' Molière.

play; he talks, he argues, just as the first-comer would do in his place; making due allowance for the style of the play as I should do every day myself. Well, there was the snag. Just because I was near akin to the character in everyday life I might be tempted to overlay him with my physical habits, to make him speak with my voice, to play him, in fact, as M. Coquelin. A betrayal of the author who demanded that I should play only Thouvenin. I had to watch myself all along, correct my behaviour, supple my movements, moderate the power of my voice, retaining out of its real resonance just what was necessary for the great speech at the end; in a word, work on my whole physiognomy so as to give to Thouvenin just his right carriage: that of a former workman, self-educated, holding his place in the world quite discreetly, while keeping, in face of the conventions and servilities of society, a freedom of judgment and an originality of speech which revealed his origin as well as his character. The characteristic value of serious study in different parts is to facilitate these transformations. The master in this art, as in everything, was Frédéric. The very word 'transfiguration' was used for the first time of a comedian, so far as I know, on the occasion of his interpretation of Ruy-Blas.¹ The word is not too strong. Is it not indeed a transfiguration to pass from Robert Macaire to Ruy-Blas?² He embodied with the same superiority the rascally ugliness of the robber and the tragic beauty of the servitor enamoured of his Queen.

For he was beautiful in Ruy-Blas. All that was haughty, irregular, harsh in his *facies* seemed to melt and soften into the shadow of a passionate melancholy,

¹ Victor Hugo.

² Henry Irving, acting in *Lyons Mail* and *Hamlet*, would indicate the same range of outward transformation.

where one saw only the mask of genius. Such power is not given to all; not even the most assiduous work will ensure it, and that brings me back again to this question of physique so vital in the theatre.

VIII

As I said before, the *facies* of an actor or some detail of his physical contours, of his architecture, has certainly the power to fix him exclusively in one type of part or even in one series of characters.¹ Some—like Delaunay—are lovers for life. There are duennas from birth, like Mme Jouassain.² Why is this? A trifle will determine; the angle formed by the nose with the line of the horizon, for example—but in regard to noses read Pascal in the case of Cleopatra.

This type is suited only to melodrama or at the best to serious comedy. That queer physical configuration finds its setting only in eccentric comedy.

Happy the actor whose physique, while constraining him in some degree to a single line, yet permits him by the strength of his talent to give it so much truth and humanity that it rises to the level of a universal type. In that way he can leave an abiding memory of himself. So Henri Monnier in *Monsieur Prud'homme*; he could do nothing else. He was always M. Prud'homme, but he made of him a legendary figure, the representation of a class, and of a period. He and his creation still live.

Still (we must be careful to insist) the one-part actor, however fine, is inferior to the actor of many parts. We should be wrong to believe that no really superior performances exist except those which realise that absolute conformity between the actor and his part.

¹ *Emploi*. See explanation of the term in Introduction, page 7.

² What variety of impersonation may nevertheless be achieved by such a player was illustrated by the late Mrs. Stirling, and by Margaret Yarde in the theatre to-day.

Frédéric, too, created a type as eternally true as that of M. Prud'homme; that Robert Macaire of whom I have already spoken, and of whom I shall speak again —a part which belonged to him peculiarly. That did not prevent him from creating Ruy-Blas. Yet in himself he was neither one nor the other of these two characters, whom indeed he almost fused in one in Dennery's *Don César de Bazan*. He would be a daring critic who affirmed that as an artist he was better in one than in the other.

The truth is he was sublime in melodrama and marvellous in comedy. His talents were equal to the task and his physique did not debar him from accomplishing it.

In effect, so long as an actor has no actual fault in his physique, while his countenance is neither more unpleasing nor more particularly comic than that of the majority of men, while his mask, even without actual beauty, is mobile enough to yield itself to dramatic expression, there is no good reason why he should not tackle both kinds of work. It is a question of propriety and also (that goes without saying) a question of talent.

Is it necessary to give examples? Naturally they are numerous. The contemporary theatre mingles the two classes of actors too closely not to demand from almost all interpreters the dual talent. What wonderful creations of the kind do we not owe to my beloved master Régnier. Did he raise a laugh in *Gabrielle* or *Le Supplice d'une femme*? And was he not faultless as Ballandard in *La Chaîne*?—one of the most irresistible peals of laughter ever known in the theatre.

Actually, physical beauty is only indispensable for the juvenile lead. To make declarations of affection in public, and to receive them, one must be built in such

a way as not to raise a smile. One must be beautiful or appear so.

There is a shade of difference. One may have the appearance of beauty, and draw all hearts without actually possessing it. I shall not, I am sure, hurt the feelings of my comrade Delaunay in telling him that his nose is not purely Greek, and yet who has looked more attractive on the stage? He had charm; something young, tender, light. It was quite indescribable, and, I do not hesitate to say, it has departed with him. Charm—yes, that is what the young actor must possess. Now if you ask me why certain people give it out as naturally as the air they breathe, and yet are far from any claim to classical beauty, why they beguile us, why the public raves about them, I cannot undertake to explain it to you.

And the young leading lady follows exactly the same rule. It is not necessary that she should be absolutely beautiful, but she must have charm. This is the moment to recall the apposite phrase of Victor Hugo to Mme Dorval, ‘You are not beautiful! You are worse!’ So lovers must be beautiful like Laferrière or appear beautiful like Delaunay. They must be among those whom the public are prepared to accept as calling up love at first sight and for ever; they come into this world beloved of men. But that does not say that they alone can be loved; on the contrary. In all our modern plays we see characters far less gifted carry off at the last the myrtle and the laurel wreath; but only *at the last*, never at once. These are loved for their wit, their character, their devotion, this reasonable passion takes its time, and the public requires time to accustom itself to the shock.

So I myself was able to play Jean Dacier, where I ended as the lover of a lady of high degree. The public

would not have endured to see me so tenderly loved at my first appearance in the play; but I only received my declaration of devotion in the last act, and then only because I was about to die! It took all the play for this love to grow, and the public accepted and followed its progress with interest. Ploughboy in the first act, then soldier, then officer, I mounted from devotion to devotion till I deserved the supreme honour of winning my wife's love—for the lady was my wife.

Many critics bitterly reproached me for attacking serious rôles.¹ My artist's conscience is at peace on that point. Never in any play have I played a part I could not play. When have I attempted lovers? Never. Jean Dacier is a character part. Is the Lute maker of Cremona a lover? Why, nobody loves him. He is a hump-back. And Chamillac? He is an eccentric, a sort of moustachioed prophet who atones for a moment of folly by redeeming murderers and who is loved only, he also, at the end of the play. It was a part demanding dignity and diction, not passion or rapture; and Gringoire, the unfortunate poet, doomed to the gallows, was he a lover? Why, the first word thrown to him, at the first glance the young heroine gives him, is: 'He is not beautiful.' Here I am on my right lines, and later on I make myself loved because poetry and pity take a hand in the matter. I transform myself; in the eyes of beauty, be it understood.

Some actors are limited to prose, others are lyrists; my ambition is to be among the latter. My friends the poets are a little to blame for that. They have so often trusted me to speak their lines, and the most guilty of them all, is he not the most lyrical of them all, the good master Banville, the father of my Gringoire? What joy

¹ *Cyrano*, the supreme triumph of Coquelin's career, was not produced till 1897.

I have had in winning applause for his divine *Socrate*,
and for many other lovely lines, all tremulous with
that eternal dawn he keeps alive within his heart.

IX

ONE word more about the physiognomy of the actor on the stage. It is the eye that sums it all up. It is the light, the transparency, the life of expression. There the public watches you, and there it tries to read you. Let it then be your first care. If you allow the glance to remain inexpressive, wandering, uninterested in what is being said or in what is happening, the public is put out; it loses interest, and begins to feel, 'Why, he isn't listening. . . . What is the matter with him? . . . He is looking at the audience. . . . Who is he looking at? . . . That lady in the second-tier boxes. . . . Now he is looking at the flies. . . . The devil, is there a fire?' And while the public considers these points, what becomes of the play? You have a story to tell, let your eye visualise the thing you speak. The public will see it reflected there. That is why, by the way, you cannot make a narrative speech in profile. Start it like that, facing your listener. Good; but little by little turn, until at last you face your public; your eye fixes itself on a point from which it does not move because it is there that you see what you are describing. That fixture of your eye carries the public panting after your words. What you are about to say they see there, before you utter it, and speech in a measure does no more than drive home the impression which the glance has already fixed in the attention of the spectator.

This fixation should not diminish in listening: if your eyes do not follow everything that your interlocutor says to you, the public no longer believes in the importance of that to which you listen so inattentively, or else they are offended by your indifference; who, for instance, could bear to see Horace turning his back to

the public during Camille's denunciation? I know all that can be said in favour of these "back effects."¹ Certain actors gifted with a fine plastic presence are very fond of them; and the back muscles have their own means of expression; they bend, crouch, straighten themselves, arch back. they can even at a pinch seem to be listening, but when an exasperated lover flings in your face thirty lines packed with the most formidable insults, it is not your back the public wants to watch; it is not in your shoulders that they will follow the growing movement of indignation, of anger and at last watch the paroxysm which unlooses murder. You will never be able to arrange for your back to express these shades of feeling with such mastery of resource as your eye, and the public who see only the back will be inclined to believe that you are making game of Corneille or of your audience.

It is impossible, however, to dogmatise in the theatre; there are a thousand ways of directing, of measuring, of veiling according to the situation, that fixation of the glance which I recommend to the listener. The eyes must always take part in the action, but they can seem to listen without betraying the fact: they can listen and seem as if they were not listening at all. You have to play in *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* the scene in which the Marquis receives, in front of the lawyer Destournelles, a note which the latter has just sent to him: Destournelles must seem to be ignorant of what the note contains; but at the same time he must study in the Marquis's face the impression made by it. Therefore every time that the Marquis bends, nose down, over the stamped paper, the sidelong

¹ *Effets de dos.* A famous English actor, Mr. Henry Neville, was fond of these effects with good physical reason, but they were very irritating to watch.—E. F.

glance of the lawyer watches him, penetrating and sly; he listens or rather reads and seems to say, ‘Well, what do you make of that, Monsieur le Marquis?’ If, on the contrary, the Marquis grows furious, interrupts his reading and looks at the lawyer, the glance of Destournelles becomes vague, his eyelids contract dreamily, his eyes wander to the skies in search of an idea or of a vagrant fly, and the more marked the irritation of the Marquis grows the more does the eye of his adversary express innocence and serenity.¹

¹This is a good instance of the exaggerated importance attached to detailed “business” on the French stage at the time. The habit of telling one story to the audience and another to the character on the stage is an inheritance from the lighted auditorium. An actor to-day would probably concern himself entirely with maintaining an unconscious expression during the reading of the note.—E. F.

It will be noticed that all this essay definitely follows the axiom which I established at its beginning: that in the actor Number One must be master of Number Two. He who sees must govern as absolutely as possible the executant. This is true at all times, but especially during the actual performance of a play. In other words, the actor must remain master of himself even in those moments where the public, carried away by his acting, thinks him most absolutely distracted; he must *see* what he is doing, judge himself, and retain his self-possession. Briefly, he must not experience a shadow of the sentiments he is expressing—at that very moment when he is expressing them with the greatest truthfulness and power.

I will not repeat what I said on this point in *The Actor as Artist*, but I wish to enforce it.

Study your part, enter into the skin of your character but never abdicate, hold the reins. Whether Number Two laughs or cries, rises to ecstasy, suffers to the point of death, let it be under the watchful rule of the ever-impassive Number One; and let it be within the limits previously deliberated and prescribed. The right interpretation once found, let it be maintained once and for all: it is for you to fix the means of recapturing it identically when and where you wish; the actor must never lose his head. It is false, it is ridiculous to think that the height of the actor's art is to forget that he is before the public. If you so identify yourself with your part that in looking at the spectators you ask yourself, *Who on earth are all those people?* and no longer know where you are, you have ceased to be an actor: you are a lunatic.

And a dangerous lunatic. Can you imagine Harpagon climbing over the footlights to seize the gentlemen of the orchestra by the throat and demand the return of his casket? Art, I repeat it, is not identification but representation. The famous axiom, 'If thou wouldest make me weep, weep then thyself,' is not therefore applicable to the actor. If he really cried he might well make us laugh; for sorrow often grimaces. I understand that a young man, a beginner, may forget himself and be carried away: anxious about his own future, the emotion he is trying to express may become confused with the personal emotions he experiences: that has happened to me as it happens to everyone, and I remember it without regret, for I was then seventeen years old. I was acting in public for the first time, and playing *Pauvre Jacques*—the part of an unhappy musician who goes mad from slighted affection (it is clear that my taste for dramatic parts corrupted me early). I was choked with emotion. But I played, and many tears were shed and—I was very sick in the wings. The story of a novice, that is all. If such a thing were to happen to me to-day I should think myself disgraced. An experienced actor must be safe from such accidents. Some eminent actors challenge this theory, I know. I remember a true and charming remark on the subject made to Mme Ristori by a young Englishwoman of the most delicate and artistic gifts. Mme Ristori was maintaining that the actor can express nothing in his action that he does not really feel. 'But, Madame,' answered Miss T—, 'when you die?'¹

It is quite plain that Mme Ristori did not really die.

¹ The reply has generally been attributed to Ellen Terry, but Miss Edith Craig tells me she does not think her mother ever met Ristori. It rather suggests Helen Faucit.—E.F.

She produced the illusion of death, and she did it extremely well, because she had studied, arranged, fixed and regulated her death beforehand, and could repeat the effect magnificently with all her lively mind thoroughly under control.¹

The actor in full possession of his powers may, notwithstanding, permit himself from time to time to try novel effects before his public; he knows that no matter what the result, he will be able to recapture himself. At that point the actor who loses his self-control is in danger of losing his head, and not finding it again for the rest of the evening. The trouble is that it is just the actors who lack control who are always experimenting; as they order nothing they are eternally seeking for effects. And they glory in it besides. I heard one of them say one day about Worms:² 'It gives me no pleasure to see him. I know beforehand every single thing he will do.' At least one knows that what he does will be good. Is that not a greater pleasure than watching an actor of whom one is never sure that he will not do something absurd? It reminds me of the Englishman who followed Batty, the lion-tamer, from town to town, hoping to see him devoured by his lions. It seems to me that the delight of the theatre is of a somewhat different nature.

¹ Fanny Kemble relates that when first playing the 'Potion' Scene in *Romeo and Juliet* the phial broke and cut her hand so seriously that she actually fainted, a fact which was not discovered till the curtain had been raised several times on a motionless Juliet. I do not think she repeated this effect.

² See Introduction, page 10.

IT is plain that I ask a great deal of the actor, yet a delicate point to determine is whether it is necessary for him to have a great degree of intelligence. There are reasons for and against it.

I have known excellent actors who outside their art were considered, not without cause, to have rather mediocre minds. The fact is that the only intelligence indispensable to the actor is *that of his own art*.

I have read, I do not know where, that the only thing Corot knew in French poetry was *Polyeucte*, and that he had never been able to get to the end of it; this did not prevent him from being himself an admirable poet . . . in painting.

The same thing is true of the actor. He may know nothing of painting, of music, even of poetry, and yet be a very fine actor, and even a poetic actor. It is enough for him to be knowledgeable in his own art, which is something quite different from all these things.¹

It is, however, quite wrong to belittle the special intelligence of the actor. Faculties which, it is recognised, enable him to move and arouse the enthusiasm of an audience are not negligible, and if it is objected that the author has a great part in his accomplishment, I recognise it, but I ask that we should recollect how little effect is produced by the finest plays badly acted. How many beautiful lines have called up laughter because they were badly spoken! Finally,

¹ The modern conception of the 'Man of the Theatre' who has taken the place of the star actor and even of the actor-manager demands much more knowledge and intelligence than this.—E. F.

taking advantage of an objection I made against myself a little farther back, there are actors in whom the power of characterisation is so strong that they create the most extraordinary, the most living, the most vivid figures from parts entirely conventional, without observation and without grandeur. Of how many plays have we not heard: 'What a poor play, but Frédéric was wonderful in it.' Into what poor tragedy did Talma breathe the genius and the soul which, vanished, left them what they were in reality: nothing.

IT is this creation of living types which constitutes the art of the theatre. It is the most human of all arts, and the supreme pleasure of the stage; that which moves the masses most powerfully and offers to the critical the keenest delight. So to my mind it must remain an *art*—that is to say, it must blend with the expression of truth the fragrance of poetry, the vision of the ideal, and that is why naturalism in the theatre seems to me a fault.

Besides, the public will not have it. It will always jib at crude, violent realism, at obscene ugliness. Even in evil or vile characterisation it demands a gleam of artistry. Paulin-Ménier in his Choppard was terrifying in his debauched realism, but he had just that touch of scampish emphasis which accentuated his personality. '*Well! Here is my head . . . Not much of a gift I am making you!*' It was a defiance to death itself. It was laughter, it was the gleam! . . .

No more than I will allow departure from truth under the pretext that it is picturesque, no more do I admit that under pretext of truth we should fall into sordid horror.

I am on the side of nature and against what is naturalistic.

Nature in art; how much could be said on that topic, for in different times and different countries nature is differently understood!

When Garrick came to France he admired our actors very much, but he did not consider them natural enough. I shall be told that that is because they were acting in tragedy, but when Talma appeared he made tragedy natural, and to that he owed his success and his influence.

Was his naturalness that of Garrick? I cannot tell. The genius of the two races is too different; the love of originality is too strong with our neighbours for them always to remain within the true measure of things; in any case, to-day it is we who when we go to see Irving no longer find him near enough to nature. The truth is his nature does not correspond to ours. We would have yet other reservations to make as to the naturalness of the Germans; sentimental beyond measure, and more allied in their philosophical affectations to the 'nature' of Diderot and the sentimental school of the later eighteenth century. In their time, we must remember, these too were innovators. That style which seems to us so far from truth they brought into the theatre in the name of nature. And it is the same great name that the Romantics bore on their banner, while we to-day despise as out-of-date their grandiloquence and their thunder-defying attitudes.

These Romantics claimed that they were giving us human drama, mingled laughter and tears, in the place of conventional tragedy; and they gave us *Antony*, *la Tour de Nesle*, *Lucrèce Borgia*; with the same good intentions, Baron Taylor collaborated with the exquisite Nodier to produce *Melmoth*, *l'Homme errant*, *les Vampires*, *Honte et Remords*, *Amour et Étourderie*, etc., etc. Plainly a humanity quite different from that of Voltaire. Actors, following in the steps of the authors, no longer found Talma natural enough. They discovered the method of talking as one talks every day, so as never to be audible; of sitting down and turning one's back to the audience as often as possible. They spoke the lines of Athalie as who should say, 'How de do? How are you?' 'Heavens, yes,' mumbled Abner. 'Yes. I come into his shrine to worship God, the Lord,' just like that, my cane in my

hand, to celebrate with you among old pals the memory of that day where upon Sinai's mount, if I am not mistaken, the Law was given us. My word! How time has changed since then, etc. etc. So they flattered themselves that they introduced nature into Racine. By way of retaliation when they were on their own ground—that is to say, in melodrama—emphasis returned to its own. It was no longer, of course, the monotonous tragic purr,¹ but a jolting sublimity, trivial effects breaking through couplets of the most frantic lyricism; antitheses to cut and come again; they never said, 'How are you?' but 'Give me thy hand that I may clasp it.' Profundity was dragged in everywhere; they wore a fatal air, wading in swagger to the top of their jack-boots. It was the day of the swayling plume;² the naturalists of to-day, the school of Coureau would gladly substitute the feather broom.

¹ No translation will give the delicious value of 'Le ronron tragique.'

² 'Panache.' This was the last word of Coquelin's greatest impersonation, Cyrano de Bergerac, at the end of the play of that name, and there it is wisely left untranslated in English versions, for it means the crest on the helmet of knighthood.

XIII

PERMIT me to insist, the importance of the subject demands it, if I refuse to believe in art without nature I will not in the theatre have nature without art. Everything must spring from truth; everything must strive towards the ideal. Comedy herself, that good, positive old girl, does she not serve the ideal by lighting up our faults and our vices with the light of her gaiety? If she limited herself to reproducing them brutally in their naked ugliness without relief, without wit, without grace, she would cease to be comedy, for we should cease to laugh.

Terror and pity are the main springs of art, not disgust and horror.

The theatre is a school of manners, not a school of medicine; and besides, pure and photographic reality is impossible in the theatre. If truth can ever seem lacking in verisimilitude it is surely here, under the glare of those lights which shine from below, instead of falling from above, in that enlarging medium which changes the scale of men, of things, even of time.

Only once I was guilty of naturalism—unintentionally—and it is still a source of compunction to me. It was on tour: I had spent the night in the train, rehearsed in the morning, and made some excursion on foot in the afternoon: I was very tired; that night I was playing Annibal in *L'Aventurière*. You know that at the end of the second act Annibal, whom Fabrice has been plying with drink to make him talk, gets tipsy and goes to sleep. I played the drunken scene as usual, neither more nor less, but when it came to sleep, the state I was mimicking seemed so sweet to me, I felt such a longing for it that I allowed myself to be over-

taken unawares: I fell to sleep on the stage; right in front of the public! I even went so far, *proh pudor!* as to snore. . . . It was not according to the stage directions, but the public listened, thought it was all in the part, and that I was putting in a bit of 'business.' Some of them laughed, others thought it in rather doubtful taste. There were not wanting those who said that I snored without grace, without truth, that I forced the note. Briefly, that it was not natural. Alas! I was indifferent to both applause and blame. I believe a hiss would not have roused me, and when the curtain fell my comrades had some difficulty in calling me back to a sense of reality. My little snooze had in fact done me a great deal of good and I finished the part gallantly.

It was a mistake, however, which might have turned out badly. Certainly I would not have allowed myself to be led away, supposing I had been timed to wake up before the end of the act; my weakness came from the fact that I knew I had nothing to do but sleep until the curtain came down, and instead of feigning sleep I gave a real performance. It was, I repeat it to my shame, naturalism of the first water. But notwithstanding! since it is well to draw morals from our faults, you see that the spectators thought that sleep badly acted: it seemed to them lacking in reality. That is the story so often verified, of the clown and the peasant. The clown mimicked the cry of a sucking-pig and was applauded. The peasant, having made a bet that he could do the trick as well, hid a real sucking-pig under his cloak, and surreptitiously pinched the animal. It squealed, and he was hissed.

That was because it happened on the boards; the point of view differs according to whether we watch from the sidewalk or from the seats of a theatre. What

would you? The pigling no doubt squealed very well, but he squealed without art.

Here we have the error of the naturalists; they always want to make real pigs squeal.

I venture to say that actors who think we can express, and ought to express, only what we ourselves experience, fall into this very same error. Here are the people who should be accused of naturalism; for if it is necessary for them to cry in order to make us cry, logic demands that they should get drunk in order to render intoxication, and in order to act a murder perfectly they should get a hypnotist to suggestionise them into stabbing a comrade—or, if necessary, the prompter. Besides, it always leads to the great danger of appearing unconvincing. If another anecdote is needed to prove my point, I will quote one of which Mr. Edwin Booth is the hero. One night he was playing *The Fool's Revenge* (*Le Roi s'amuse*). The part was one of his best, and he enjoyed playing it. This time he satisfied himself even better than usual; the force of the situations, the pathos of the language worked on him so powerfully that he identified himself completely with his character. Real tears fell from his eyes, his voice was broken with emotion; real sobs choked him, and it seemed to him that he had never played so well. The performance over, he saw his daughter hurrying towards him; she, his truest critic, had been watching the scene from a box, and was hastening anxiously to inquire what was the matter, and how it happened that he had played so badly that night! A valuable confirmation of that famous paradox of Diderot's; the truth according to my mind is that in order to call forth emotion we ourselves must not feel it; and that the actor must in all circumstances remain the absolute master of himself, and leave nothing to chance.

DISSERTATIONS on art too often seem to end in mere hair-splitting, and with all my *distinguo* I may not have avoided the danger. But remember what I said above about the magnifying power of the theatre. The foot-lights exaggerate everything. They modify the laws of space and of time.¹ They gather leagues into so many square yards; they make minutes seem like hours. What seems a mere guiding thread at a reading grows at performance to the thickness of a cable.²

Do not let us be afraid, then, of insisting upon fine distinctions. I repeat: Naturalness may differ in kind.

To say a thing is natural does not imply that it is uniform. Two individuals may be completely dissimilar in the expression of their sentiments, yet each may be as sincere and, therefore, as natural as the other.

In France, the natural temperaments of the South and of the North differ absolutely. One must learn to feel these nuances.

Let me add that criticism must be prepared to recognise similar shades of difference in the work of actors. According to their own temperamental peculiarities actors of equal merit may reproduce very different aspects of nature. At first sight you may even find something excessive in the acting of very great artists, something so out of the ordinary that from the point of view of fidelity to nature they compare

¹ This exaggeration is most visible in regard to force; and these three elements, force, time and space, together form the rhythm which the actor has to acquire before he can express himself freely in the theatre; his 'sense of the stage.'—E. F.

² *Une ficelle* is an artificial train of action needed for the plot, but not springing naturally from the action.

unfavourably with artists of the second rank. But this is only apparent. Such players give to their creations something of their personal grandeur; that is all. Their naturalness is that of the eagle, not of the domestic hen. But, eagle or hen, no one is above the general laws of art. Truth, proportion, harmony—these are the same for everyone. One more point, and I should like to conclude with it. It requires some explanation in order to make it comprehensible.

As one does not play melodrama on the same lines as comedy, even so Molière must not be produced like Beaumarchais, nor Augier like Meilhac. Every dramatist has his own peculiar mental outlook, his works reveal it, and the actor must reflect it, for he is not merely the interpreter of a single author. Take Dumas Fils, and I am sure you will feel how true this is. Is not every character whom he creates a kind of missionary, charged with the propaganda of the master's ideas for the benefit of his audience and to obtain as many converts as possible? If that is so, how can you play such parts as you would those of the elder Dumas, for example? These have no desire to demonstrate anything at all; they go their mighty way, nimble, abounding, swift—now caracoling, now pirouetting, always level with the ground, with no other care but to amuse the world and give rein to their imagination. The one romances even in his plays, and makes history serve his purpose in the process. The other theorises, and uses realism as his servant. What intelligence in both of them! What a contrast between the universal animation of the one and the concentrated irony of the other! The Gascon buoyancy of the one and the Parisian acerbity of the other; the words of the father are rockets, the words of the son are bullets. An actor must take account of all this if he does not wish to play

Mlle de Belle-Isle like *Le Demi-Monde*, and Richelieu like Olivier de Jalin.

These are totally distinct types, each characteristic of the brain that created them. The same thing is true of the more modest characters of Labiche and Scribe. From the brain of their creator they have kept the accent of their origin—accent, that indescribable thing by virtue of which, whatever their age, sex or character, the *Canebière* breathes again harmoniously upon the lips of every child of Marseilles.

This accent, the accent of the author, the actor too must have it. It is his business to penetrate deeply enough into his man to find it. It is another form of collaboration, truer and more intimate than that which he undertakes in working out his part and inspiring it with vitality.

I will not speak of the tragedians, not because I have nothing to say: on the contrary, I would gladly insist that they, too, should be played as men of their period. If you are playing in Corneille, do not occupy yourself with an effort to *humanise* him; still less to Latinise him; play him frankly as he saw himself, as a Spaniard of the seventeenth century, as a Norman—that is to say, very nearly a Gascon, more knight than lawyer, a Frenchman in the dawn of the *grand siècle*, only great, perhaps, because of that very dawn: the glorious days when men conspired like Cinna with Montmorency or de Thou, played at politics like Flaminius or Severus, with Retz or Richelieu, intrigued, playing at politics again, with the Émilies of the Fronde; give to your Corneille, in one word, the Cornelian accent. He is a lyryst, spread your wings!

With Racine, in whom I find equal genius (you see, I do not mince matters), furl them again. Human stature has diminished. We are still under Louis XIV,

but what is lost in grandeur we have gained in politeness. Good manners rule, but with sobriety; argument takes the place of eloquence. Lyricism has grown elegiac; there are no illusions. Racine's aim is to charm rather than to dazzle. Racine, the most feminine of all our authors, demands to be played with discretion, with delicacy; even Roxana, even Phædra, must keep on the stage the measure the author has imposed upon them in his style. That was how Rachel achieved her triumph.

When you play Molière, take on his breadth, his admirable precision, so indifferent to the mere sparkle of wit, so fascinated, on the contrary, by the broad, open countenance of truth. Take on his gaiety, so completely the natural state of his soul that it becomes most apparent in his latest plays, and that neither sickness nor sorrow can quench that gallant laughter, devoid, whatever men may say, of all admixture of misanthropic bitterness. Speak with fitting breadth that glorious language of comedy, the finest in the theatre.

With Regnard you may take greater liberties. In him fancy often takes the place of observation, but be full of alacrity. Don't be afraid to let that abounding vitality run riot a little; nonchalant and light in pursuit, Rabelais would say, and bold in encounter.

Beaumarchais is something quite different; no sap flowing spontaneously from a naturally joyful soul. Witty, combative, carping, provocative; so rich in all these things that he lavishes them on his characters. That hobbled ass of a Brid'oison, even *he* has wit; poise, audacity, *brass!* that is what you need to play Beaumarchais.

Marivaux saves himself from his intellectuality by his grace. Otherwise it would be overpowering. Nevertheless he is truer than he seems, and it is his

expressiveness, by its selective power, which deadens our sense of his gifts of observation, acute as they always are. The comedy of his serving-men, which is a little gross, still seems to me natural and quite in character; forced, it would be deafening, but frank it must be. So it will contrast usefully with that delicate preciousity in the rest of the play, which might grow a little insipid in the long run. Little paths all sown with roses—where the spectators must not be allowed to go to sleep.

Among our contemporaries, without any question, it is Augier who comes nearest to Molière, however modern his style. His *Lionne pauvre* and *Giboyer* are the most significant figures of our time. He has in his style something of the terseness, the precision of his master. Like him, he loves legal terms. His style, not so rich, has vigour and a fine sonority, especially in prose. He must be acted broadly; he belongs to the grand repertory.

Meilhac and Gondinet are full of delicate observation. They remain deliberately fantastic, playing upon the surface with charming imagination, lightened by a good spice of truth. But certain strokes make it clear that they understand the inner meaning of things to perfection. Only, with Gondinet, those strokes leave no sense of bitterness. Meilhac, on the contrary, sharpens, envenoms, and drives them in to the quick. Their fantasies, therefore, cannot be played in the same manner. Both need lightness of touch, *bon enfant* for the one, *enfant terrible* for the other. Gondinet is gay, without rancour. He can drive home his points to the hilt, but he retains a fund of commonsense. Meilhac is eighteenth century, impertinent, whimsical. Don't be afraid to make his points sharply, with biting emphasis, but with dexterity; in a burst of laughter. His more

deliberate gaiety may degenerate into incoherence : save it by lightness of touch.

Halévy, too, is subtle : less studied, perhaps, but very delicate. In all that he writes there is a vibration of sympathy, and without being the dupe of others, he is not one of those dilettanti who prefer a well-garnished vice or monstrous singularity to simple virtue. Witty like Meilhac, Pailleron, like Halévy, has a touch of sentiment. By the fineness of his art, wit and sentiment alike seem natural in him. You must not let drive at his lines. He must be played freely, deliberately, gaily, altogether in the French fashion.

Feuillet needs more nervous force. He is theoretical like Dumas, but romantic and fatal. He has distinction, the manner of the great world with a touch of Romanticism. There is a good deal of Lara in his heroes, but they are good Catholics, and even in their crimes pay respect to the conventions. I frankly confess that for my part I rave about him. He is the most idealistic of our writers.

And Scribe has less idealism than anyone else. There is no difficulty in playing him with the same familiarity which we find in his works. He does not speak a tongue with which one may take no liberties. Otherwise, a clever fellow, splendid in construction, incomparable if Sardou, who is his superior in breadth of intelligence, had not followed him. Sardou, the Proteus of the theatre, so swift, so fertile, adroit to the point of genius, extraordinary in invention, unequalled in execution, who has summoned back into his castes all the striking personalities of drama or of fiction. Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Hoffman, who knows how to contrive and disentangle everything; he passes without effort from melodrama to a fairy tale, from social comedy to vaudeville. He should be played as he him-

self reads his plays! . . . He is a marvellous reader. He must be played according to his own directions, as we see him at rehearsal; multiplying himself, playing every part, and all to perfection.

I need not say how Musset should be played. The whole world still remembers, thank Heaven, the creations of Delaunay.

He has left his stamp upon the theatre. For a long time we shall wonder if de Musset is possible without him. Nothing shows better what I am now trying to prove, that each author demands special qualities of interpretation. Delaunay had in the highest degree all those needed to play the poet in *Chandelier* and *On ne badine pas avec l'Amour*. He was 'Mussetian,' as others are Shakespearean. But not only that. Other players have not that breadth of style, and as there are some who can play but one part, so we find others who can only interpret one author.

Hugo must be played lyrically. He is that above all. And he treated lyrically the most dramatic situations he could find, so much so that they sometimes seem nothing but opportunities for a magnificent outpouring of poetry. No one is so completely present under the skin of his own characters. Who are Don César and Ruy-Blas? Fantastic lyrists. It has not been possible for me, I must confess, to find anything else in them, and I have been unable to play them otherwise. As a creator of character, I have already said, Victor Hugo seems to me inferior to Molière or to Shakespeare. In their characters we see not the author but humanity. But do not think from this admission that I rank myself with the detractors of the master, or that because I place him in the theatre below Shakespeare and Molière I rank him in poetry behind Lamartine or Musset. Inferior to his two dramatic rivals as a creator of men,

Hugo is greater than them all in transcending humanity. Within him he has Homer, Pindar, Anacreon, Horace, Lucretius, Juvenal, Agrippa d'Aubigné, Ronsard, Régnier, Chénier. He has the mighty flow of those Indian epics, intoxicated with Pantheism, as well as the rude and heroic simplicity of the mediaeval romancers. He is the poet of miracle.

I shall be accused of contradiction, at least in regard to Molière and Shakespeare, when on the one hand I declare that I never discover them in their own works, and on the other when I invite all to seek them there and to play them in a certain style. The contradiction is more apparent than real. The personages created by these great men live their own proper and independent lives. Neither Shakespeare nor Molière paint themselves or repeat themselves in their characters. These are men—men whom we know, whom we are going to meet presently in the street. Yet, when we meet them, shall we confound the men of Shakespeare with those of Molière? No. We shall easily differentiate between their creators and restore to each the types that belong to him of right. The fact is, that in their outlook upon all humanity, these geniuses select their types by certain impulses which arise from their own manner of understanding life. Molière goes for the large, sure, frank type; Shakespeare for the type which is extravagant, passionate, unruly. Not only do they so select their characters, but they choose among the thousand traits by which man reveals himself those which seem to them most characteristic, and colour their expression after their own manner. They have the power of creating men, but even more marvellously that of creating the spaces in which they make them live, the atmosphere that fills these spaces, the light that bathes this atmosphere. That is their peculiar genius.

It is this choice of types and of expressions, this diversity of colour and background—all that conforms to the innate constitution of their genius—which constitutes their style, their manner, and by that it is that their personality appears. The foundation is universal, the form belongs to each of them alone. Within the humble course of his powers, the actor must realise something similar to this. He can stamp his individuality on the rôles he interprets, but that stamp must blend with the reality of the character, so that it becomes clear to the spectator only by reflection and by comparison.

In watching him play, it is necessary that the spectator should forget him, and see only the character he represents. He is excellent, and it is a proof of his superiority, when in re-reading the play or in seeing it played by another, the spectator remembers him and cries : ‘He alone could play that part !’

Who knows ? Is it not perhaps because Shakespeare and Molière both belong to our own craft that they understood how to banish their “I” from their works, stamped so profoundly nevertheless with the seal of their genius. Let us study them unceasingly, frail as we are, and above and beyond this (that we may verify and complete ourselves like them), let us never cease to contemplate as they did the eternal, the Divine Comedy in Nature herself.



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